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EDITORIAL.

THE PRICELESS GIFT OF SIGHT.

Can there be a disability which elicits our warmer sympathy than blindness, whether congenital or acquired? Those of us who love beauty of form and colour, in Nature and Art, to whom mountains and rivers, the sea and lakes, sunrise and sunsets, light and shadow, are a perpetual delight, respond in the negative to the question. The measure of our sympathy will be the measure of our appreciation of the good work done by the National Institute for the Blind, the Headquarters of which are at 224-228, Great Portland Street, London, W.1, of which His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen are Patrons; Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, President of Chorley Wood College; and Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice, President of the Sunshine Homes. The Chairman of the Executive Council is Captain Sir Beachcroft Towse, V.C., K.C.V.O., C.B.E., and the Secretary-General W. McG. Eagar, Esq., B.A.

Those who wish to acquire knowledge of the work of the Institute or to learn more of its manifold activities should visit its Headquarters in Great Portland Street, where they are warmly welcomed at any time, but special facilities for inspection are provided at 2.45 every Wednesday (Visitors' Day), Monday and Friday. On Saturdays the blind staff are not at work. Copies of the extremely interesting illustrated annual report can be obtained from Headquarters at 6d. per copy.

One of the most useful of the manifold activities of the Institute is the Students' Library and Manuscript Braille. In the Library are 10,000 Braille volumes. These are being added to at the rate of eight or nine hundred volumes a year, and are in constant circulation amongst blind students and professional people in all parts of the world. This year alone 4,000 volumes have been sent to readers.

The first blind student to read Honours French at Oxford writes of "the wonderful co-operation" of the Students' Library, and another is "astonished at the speed and excellence of transcription and most tremendously grateful." These fervent expressions of gratitude are, we are told, mainly due to a devoted band of men and women who voluntarily undertake, after learning Braille and passing the Institute's Braille Proficiency Test, to make by hand Braille transcriptions of any books a blind student or professional person needs for his studies or work.

Music in Braille Notation, and the Manuscript Music Library are other activities of the Institute, and assistance in securing engagements is afforded to blind musicians by the Institute's Employment Bureau.

Of the Sunshine Homes for Blind Babies the photographs reproduced are convincing proof of the happy conditions under which these children live. They are just ordinary lovable bonny children with happy intelligent faces and healthy bodies.

The College for girls at Chorley Wood is similar in every respect to any other public school, save for the lack of sight of the pupils. Scholastically, we are told, they can hold their heads high. One has just been accepted for admission to Newnham College, Cambridge, and others have demonstrated their powers in less academic directions, such as providing an excellent six-course dinner for members of the staff, cooking, laying and decorating the tables, serving and waiting. It seems almost incredible.

The School of Massage is a great success, and massage is apparently the only profession in which blindness can be an asset. There is generally a feeling of wonder in the mind of a patient at the ease with which a blind masseur moves about his clinic and the dexterity with which he handles delicate apparatus, and this deepens to a sense of security in the ability of a person so obviously able to overcome a handicap much greater than a fractured limb or a bad attack of rheumatism. Figures prove this fact: a very high percentage of the blind men and women trained at the Institute's Massage School are entirely self-supporting."

The Prince of Wales, when opening the Alfred Eichholz Memorial Clinic and Institute of Massage and Physiotherapy by the Blind in June of last year, spoke most appreciatively of the work of the School of Massage, and said the new Clinic marked the accomplishment of the first stage of its work, and the inauguration of the second, in the promotion of massage as a profession for the blind.

Not the least beneficent of the Institute's activities is the Home Workers' Scheme. The Scheme provides employment to 300 blind men and women engaged in various handicrafts in their own homes by rendering the following services: provision of raw materials at low cost; provision and renewal of tools and equipment; skilled supervision, marketing of products; supply of publicity material.

Surely those who possess the priceless gift of sight will feel an urge to help in some degree an institution which works so beneficently and sympathetically for those handicapped in the battle of life by the withdrawal of this most precious gift.

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